



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Eastern District of Virginia*

Paul J. McNulty
United States Attorney

2100 Jamieson Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314 (703) 299-3700

Press Release

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For further information contact
Sam Dibbley 703-842-4050

Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced that Lorena Maria Portillo pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to make false statements in a passport application. Her sentencing has been set for January 20, 2006, at which time she faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

According to papers filed with the Court, Portillo conspired with Belkis Diaz and others to cause women to submit false passport applications using the identities of their minor children. Diaz was the organizer and leader of a large-scale passport fraud ring that included participants in Virginia, the District of Columbia, and New York. She recruited at least 12 women to sell their children's identities and to make false statements in passport applications, so that aliens could obtain fraudulent passports to enter the United States illegally. A mother recruited by Diaz would fill out a passport application using the identifying information of her U.S. child, but would attach to the application a picture supplied by Diaz that was of an alien child. An apparently valid passport would then be issued bearing the photograph of the alien child, but with all the identifying information of the U.S. child. As part of the scheme, Diaz targeted drug-dependent women and their vulnerable children. She paid the mothers about \$300 for each passport application. She also paid some of the women about \$150 to recruit other women willing to sell their children's identities. Diaz herself, however, received about \$6,000 from the aliens for each fraudulent passport. As part of the scheme, Portillo, a notary public for the Commonwealth of Virginia, used her notary seal on false documentation that was used to enable an alien child to enter the United States unaccompanied by the child's parents. Portillo also used her notary seal on written agreements Diaz had with purchasers of the fraudulent passports. Portillo had been a fugitive since February 2004, when a warrant was issued for her arrest. She was apprehended in California in August 2005.

Diaz was sentenced on January 28, 2005, to 63 months in prison.

Today's conviction is a result of an investigation code named Operation American Child by special agents of the U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Security Service. The investigation has yielded 13 convictions to date. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney James P. Gillis.

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